

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
(ISO) W
-----031795 302343Z /23

P R 302032Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8837
INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

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EO 11652 NA
TAGS PINT BR
SUBJECT: RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. SUMMARY: THE AUGUST 23 NOMINATION OF RETIRED GENERAL EULER BENTES MONTEIRO AS THE MDB'S CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY ASSURED BRAZIL OF ITS LIVELIEST POLITICAL CAMPAIGN SINCE THE 1964 REVOLUTION. THE FOLLOWING IS AN OUTLINE OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY ON A NUMBER OF ELECTION-RELATED FRONTS AS THE COUNTRY PREPARES FOR THE FIRST ROUND OF BALLOTING; THE INDIRECT ELECTION OF STATE GOVERNORS AND ONE THIRD OF THE SENATE ON SEPTEMBER 1. END SUMMARY.

2. MDB CANDIDATE BENTES MONTEIRO FOLLOWED HIS NOMINATION WITH A QUICK CAMPAIGN TRIP TO RECIFE AND THE NEIGHBORING CITY OF OLINDA AUGUST 25 AND 26. REPEATING MANY OF THE THEMES OF HIS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH (BRASILIA 6680), HE CRITICIZED THE GEISEL ADMINISTRATION FOR DENYING THE BRAZILIAN PEOPLE A ROLE IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE NATION AND CONSEQUENTLY EXACERBATING THE SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS SUFFERED BY THE BULK OF THE POPULATION, ESPECIALLY IN THE NORTHEAST. TO REMEDY THE SITUATION, HE CALLED FOR "IMMEDIATE REDEMOCRATIZATION" OF THE COUNTRY WITH INCREASED EMPHASIS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

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EULER HAS SCHEDULED ANOTHER CAMPAIGN TRIP--TO SAO PAULO--FOR LATER THIS WEEK.

3. ARENA PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JOAO BAPTISTA FIGUEIREDO DID EXTENSIVE CAMPAIGNING IN THE STATE OF SAO PAULO LAST WEEK AND BEGAN A TWO-DAY VISIT TO THE NORTH ON AUGUST 29. DURING HIS SAO PAULO TRIP, FIGUEIREDO TOLD REPORTS THAT "IF CIRCUMSTANCES ARE FAVORABLE" HE I

INTENDS TO RESTORE FULL DEMOCRACY TO THE COUNTRY"AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER ASSUMING OFFICE". HOWEVER, HE WARNED THAT IMMEDIATE DEMOCRATIZATION--ENTAILING THE SETTING ASIDE OF ELECTORAL PROCEDURES AND TIMETABLES ALREADY ESTABLISHED--COULD "TRAUMATIZA" THE COUNTRY. ON THE SUBJECT OF HIS MDB RIVAL, FIGUEIREDO SAID THAT THE BENTES MONTEIRO CANDIDACY CAUSED HIM NO ALARM AND THAT, IN FACT, THE OPPOSITION STANDARD BEARER WAS "ALREADY DEFEATED." SIMILAR SENTIMENTS WERE REFLECTED PUBLICLY A FEW DAYS LATER BY OTHER TOP ARENA LEADERS WHO SAID, FOLLOWING A POLITICAL STRATEGY SESSION, THAT THE PARTY CONTEMPLATED NO CHANGE IN ITS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN AS A RESULT OF THE MDB CANDIDACY. MAVERICK ARENA SENATOR MAGALHAES PINTO CONTINUED TO BE WOODED BY SUPPORTERS OF BOTH CANDIDATES. HE TOLD THE PRESS AUGUST 28 THAT HE MAY COME TO A DECISION BY THE END OF THIS WEEK, ADDING THAT HE WOULD NOT ABANDON HIS OWN CAMPAIGN FOR IMMEDIATE DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE COUNTRY.

4. WITH MAGALHAES PINTO OUT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE AND BENTES MONTEIRO NOW IN THE MDB, THERE SEEMS TO BE NO FUTURE FOR THE FRONT FOR REDEMOCRATIZATION WHICH, FOR A TIME, WAS SEEN BY SOME AS A POSSIBLE VEHICLE FOR BOTH (OR EITHER) EULER'S AND MAGALHAES' PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRATIONS. IN FACT, THE APPARENT DEMISE OF THE FRONT WAS SIGNALLED EARLIER THIS MONTH WHEN, DURING AN AUGUST 10 RALLY IN PORTO ALEGRE, MAGALHAES WAS SHOUTED DOWN BY HUNDRES OF YOUNG MDB AND OTHER MILITANTS; MAGALHAES AND OTHERS, INCLUDING MDB LEADERS AND THE PRESS, WERE SHARPLY CRITICAL OF WHAT THEY CALLED THIS DENIAL OF FREE SPEECH BY ELEMENTS SUPPOSEDLY CLAMORNING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOR FULL DEMOCRACY. DURING HIS AUGUST 23 ACCEPTANCE SPEECH, BENTES MONTEIRO PRAISED THE FRONT FOR ITS PAST CONTRIBUTION BUT INDICATED THAT IN HIS FIEW, THE MDB WOULD HENCEFORTH BE THE PRINCIPAL CHANNEL FOR OPPOSITION POLITICAL EXPRESSION.

5. MEANWHILE, GEISEL'S POLITICAL REFORM PACKAGE (SUBMITTED TO THE CONGRESS IN LATE JUNE), REMAINS THE OBJECT OF INTENSE BEHIND THE SCENES DISCUSSION. FOLLOWING PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ARENA AND MDB LEGISLATIVE LEADERS OVER VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE PACKAGE

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CHAIRMAN(SENATOR) JOSE SARNEY OF THE MIXED CONGRESSIONAL COMMISSION VETTING THE PROPOSALS BRIEFED GEN FIGUEIREDO AUGUST 28. SARNEY LATER TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S ORIGINAL PROPOSALS COULD BE SUBJECT TO ALTERATION IN CERTAIN AREAS BUT THAT AMENDMENTS WHICH WOULD CHANGE THE BSIC PHILOSOPHY OF THE PACKAGE WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED. (THIS IS NOT INCONSISTENT WITH PREVIOUS STATEMENTS BY ADMINISTRATION SPOKESMEN.) SARNEY IS NOW EXPECTED TO RETURN THE REFORM PROPOSALS TOGETHER WITH SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS TO PRESIDENT GEISEL FOR FINAL REVIEW NEXT WEEK.

6. ON A RELATED FRONT, THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT INTRODUCED BY SEN FRANCO MONTORO (BRASILIA 6114) CALLING FOR

IMMEDIATE DIRECT ELECTION OF GOVERNORS AND ALL SENATORS, AS
SIDETRACKED LAST WEEK BY ARENA PARLIAMENTARY MANEUVERING AND,
NOT SURPRISINGLY, STANDS NO CHANCE OF COMING TO A VOTE IN TIME
TO AFFECT THE INDIRECT ELECTION ON SEPTEMBER 1.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTIONS, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BRASIL06833
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780354-1043
Format: TEL
From: BRASILIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978085/aaaaadxf.tel
Line Count: 121
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 13f36f61-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1698373
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS
TAGS: PINT, BR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/13f36f61-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014